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THE DINERS CLUB MAGAZINE

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Chicago/Gravenhorst & Associates, 35 East
Wacker Drive □ Detroit/Frank Heib, 650
North Woodward, Birmingham, Michigan □
Los Angeles/Duncan Scott & Marshall, 1830
West 8th Street □ San Francisco/Duncan
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exclusively by The Diners Club, Inc. ■ An
edition of The Diners Club Magazine is
published in Athens, Bogota, Bombay,
Brussels, London, Manila, Melbourne, Mexico
City, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Tokyo,
Zurich.

DINERS CLUB OFFICES

New York: 10 Columbus Circle, New York,
N.Y. 10019, Circle 5-1500; Chicago: 180
North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois
60601, RA 6-2775; Los Angeles: Gateway
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United States: Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Den-
ver, Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Miami
Beach, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Phoenix,
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ronto ■ Puerto Rico: San Juan

Published twelve times yearly by The Diners
Club, Inc., 10 Columbus Circle, New York,
N. Y. 10019, Alfred Bloomingdale, President
and Chairman of the Board. Two dollars
paid annual subscription to Signature—The
Diners Club Magazine. Publication Office:
2201 Haskell Ave., Lawrence, Kansas. Second-
class postage paid at Lawrence, Kansas, and
at additional mailing offices.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: SUBSCRIBERS—

Please send change of address to The Diners
Club office in New York or Los Angeles,
whichever handles your account.

POSTMASTER—Please mail form 3579 no-
tices to: Circulation Manager, Signature—The
Diners Club Magazine, 10 Columbus Circle,
New York, New York 10019.

For editorial and advertising information,
contact: Business Manager, Signature—The
Diners Club Magazine, 10 Columbus Circle,
New York City, New York 10019, Circle
5-1500, Ext. 265.

VOL. 2 ISSUE 8E/AUGUST 1967

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OUR COVER

In her portrait of Nantucket, artist Ellen Raskin
depicts the island's dual personality: the old
whaling center with its neoclassic and Colonial
architecture and the breezy summer happening—a
golden inlet that caters both to crowd-seekers and
the pursuers of solitude.

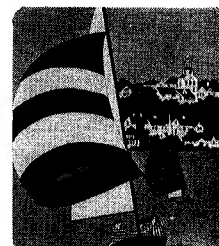


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Put Your Head Upon My Knee

THE SHORT SHORT/by Jack Ritchie

"Suppose I give him both pills at once?" Nedda asked.

"He would die before the process is completed," Mr. Corgu said. "And then, of course, you would have a body on your hands, and it is notoriously difficult to dispose of a body."

Nedda stared at the small envelope for a few moments and then dropped it into her purse. "How long will this . . . this process take?"

"The first pill does the major work, but it loses its momentum, so to speak, at the end of approximately one hour. The second pill completes the job, and rather quickly. A matter of four to five additional minutes," Corgu smiled. "It is best to pulverize the pills and dissolve them in a liquid."

"And then he just . . . just disappears?"

"Exactly," Corgu said. "He is—how shall we say—*unborn*?"

Nedda's face remained expressionless. "How do you . . . how did you know what I wanted?"

Corgu showed white teeth again. "I observe and evaluate faces. I flatter myself that I see what lies behind the unhappiness they show. Mrs. Randall, you are not the first woman I have done business with." He fanned the one-thousand-dollar bills she had given him and verified their number. "Soon you will be feeling happier," he said. "Much happier."

"Yes," Nedda agreed. "I think I will."

Nedda drove home and parked her car in the circular driveway before the large house.

She stopped for a moment in the hallway and looked around. *Yes, she thought, it's a cold house. A lonely house. Even with the servants about.*

She turned into the large living room and went directly to the liquor cabinet. Using the back of one of the measuring spoons, she pulverized one of the pills and tapped the powder into a tall glass. She set it behind a rum bottle on one of the shelves.

It was almost 5 when her husband's car pulled into the driveway and parked behind hers. At the window, Nedda watched as Alan shouldered his golf clubs and walked toward the front door.

He was still so handsome, Nedda thought, so incredibly handsome, even after 10 years of marriage.

Alan paused for a moment in the doorway. "How about fixing me a drink while I put these clubs away?"

"All right," Nedda said. She waited until he disappeared and then went back to the liquor cabinet. She poured bourbon into the tall glass and added soda and

ice. Then she stirred the drink until the powder dissolved.

Yes, she thought again, incredibly handsome, and 10 years had done nothing to change that. And 10 years had changed nothing else, either. Nothing at all. Alan was just as self-centered, as cold, as aloof as ever.

But she had known Alan was like that even before their marriage. Their families had moved in the same circles, and she had first met Alan when he was 9 and she 7.

No, it wasn't Alan's fault that he had become the man he now was. His parents had gone about their own affairs and left him to the care of nursemaids and tutors.

If only his parents had shown him some affection. She sighed. Even as a child, her heart had gone out to the sad-eyed, handsome boy. And later she had thought that it might be possible for Alan to find happiness in their marriage. But it was too late. Years too late. The lonely days he had spent as a child had made him aloof from—even suspicious of—love.

If only she and Alan had been fortunate enough to . . . Nedda shook her head. No. That wouldn't really have made any difference. That wouldn't have changed anything. Alan had already been shaped by the years.

When Alan entered the room again, she had the drink waiting for him. He took the glass, said an automatic thanks and went to the davenport. "Shot a 78 today," he said. He picked up the paper and began reading.

No, Nedda thought, it's not his fault. Not really.

She watched him finish the drink and place the glass on a side table. He continued reading for a few moments more and then his eyes closed.

Nedda caught him as he slipped to one side, and placed a pillow beneath his head.

How long had Corgu said it would take? An hour?

She moved to the window and deliberately kept her eyes on the grounds. She waited 10 minutes, 15, and then could endure it no longer. She had to know.

She turned and gasped. Yes, it was true. Her husband was 10 years younger. At least that.

And now Nedda sat and watched, her eyes wide.

An hour passed and Nedda smiled.

It had stopped.

She stared down at her husband. *Whatever made Corgu think she wanted to use both of the pills? Or had ever intended to?*

Her eyes glowed. How old was Alan now?

Two months? Three?

She picked him up and gently rocked him back and forth. "There now," she said softly. "Mommy will love you. Really she will." ☐